



Republican Policy Committee

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Paying For Presidential Elections Means Fewer Dollars For Deficit Reduction

The Senate budget resolution (S. Con. Res. 13) assumes that taxpayers will no longer subsidize presidential election campaigns after the 1996 election. Eliminating these subsidies will provide hundreds of millions of dollars that can help reduce the deficit.

In 1994, taxpayer participation in the check off system continued to decline, reaching the lowest point ever — 14 percent. The check off system amounts to a national referendum every April 15th — and last year 86 percent of all taxpayers voted no!

The participation rate has fallen steadily since 1980 when it reached a high of 28.7 percent. Even at its high point, more than seven of every ten taxpayers voted no.

The first public funds went to presidential campaigns in 1976. Since then, taxpayers have spent something like \$660 million on presidential election campaigns.

Minor party candidates also have received millions of dollars. For example, taxpayers have sent money to the political campaigns of Lenora Fulani, Sonia Johnson, Lyndon LaRouche (a Democratic candidate), and others.

Taxpayers also have paid millions of dollars for nominating conventions. In 1992, the Republican convention and the Democratic convention each received more than \$11 million from the Federal Treasury. The law also makes minor political parties eligible for federal funds for their conventions. Many taxpayers resent paying for balloons and confetti.

Candidates Bill Clinton and George Bush each got more than \$55 million from the Federal Treasury in 1992. Cash from the federal cow is always hard to turn down. Only two major-party candidates have ever rejected the cash, John Connally in 1980 and Eugene McCarthy in 1992.

The Check Off Myth

It is true that when a taxpayer "checks off" \$3 on his or her tax return that the individual's taxes *on that return* are not increased. However, it cannot be true that the check off does not increase federal taxes overall. After all, the hundreds of millions of dollars that go to campaigns

and conventions do come out of the Federal Treasury and cannot be used for other purposes. The budget resolution assumes that after the 1996 elections those millions of dollars will be used for more pressing needs, such as reducing the debt burden on America's children.

Senate Votes on Ending Taxpayer Subsidies to the Check Off

In 1993, President Clinton signed a bill raising the check off amount from \$1 to \$3 (and from \$2 to \$6 for a joint return). In 1994, the first year under the \$3 check off, the Campaign Fund received about \$71 million from 23.7 million taxpayers. If the check-off amount had stayed at \$1, the fund would now be insolvent.

In recent years, when given the opportunity to vote to use federal dollars for purposes more pressing than political campaigns, Democratic Senators have overwhelmingly supported the current system, including the tripling of the check-off amount, while Republican Senators have overwhelmingly supported the alternative uses, as shown below:

- On February 10, 1994, Senator Murkowski moved to amend the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act with sense-of-the-Senate language to replace the presidential check off with a check off for a natural disaster trust fund. A motion to waive a point of order against the amendment failed on a vote of 37 to 58 (RVA 38). Fifty-four Democrats and four Republicans voted against waiving the point of order; 36 Republicans and one Democrat (Senator Shelby) voted to waive the point of order.
- On June 24, 1993, Senator McConnell moved to amend the Budget Reconciliation Act to strike the provision that tripled the check-off amount for the Presidential Election Campaign Fund. The McConnell amendment was tabled on a vote of 55 to 43 (RVA 177). Fifty-four Democrats and one Republican voted to table; 42 Republicans and one Democrat (Senator Shelby) voted not to table. The provision tripling the allowable check off was enacted into law, Pub. L. 103-66, §13441(a).
- On May 23, 1991, Senator McConnell moved to amend a campaign finance "reform" bill to repeal public funding for party nominating conventions. The amendment was tabled on a vote of 53 (all Democrats) to 45 (42 Republicans and Senators Bryan, Exon, and Kerrey) (RVA 82).
- May 22, 1991, Senator McConnell moved to amend a campaign finance "reform" bill to repeal public financing of presidential elections and the preferable mailing rates that are used by political parties. The amendment was tabled on a vote of 60 to 38 (RVA 73). Fifty-six Democrats and four Republicans voted to table; 38 Republicans voted not to table.

The budget resolution assumes that the American people believe that ballooning deficits are more important than convention balloons.

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